

Community Building in and Around Supportive Residences

participant materials
supportive housing training series



CORPORATION *for* SUPPORTIVE HOUSING



CUCS
Center for Urban Community Services, Inc.

Community Building in and Around Supportive Residences

Participant Materials

Developed by Center for Urban Community Services

The work that provided the basis for this publication was supported by funding under an award with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to the Corporation for Supportive Housing. The substance and findings of the work are dedicated to the public. The author and publisher are solely responsible for the accuracy of statements and interpretations. Such interpretations do not necessarily reflect the views of the Government.

Community Building in and Around Supportive Residences is part of the Supportive Housing Training Series. This training series currently includes eleven curricula providing best practices and guidance on supportive housing development, operation and services.

The full series is available for downloading from the Department of Housing and Urban Development website.

For more information:

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development: www.hud.gov

Center for Urban Community Services: www.cucs.org

Corporation for Supportive Housing: www.csh.org

AGENDA

I. INTRODUCTION

II. OVERVIEW AND HISTORY

- A. History of Community Building in Supportive Housing
- B. Community Building Activities and Terms Defined

III. BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES OF COMMUNITY BUILDING

IV. STRATEGIES AND TECHNIQUES FOR BUILDING A POSITIVE COMMUNITY

- A. Engaging and Fostering Relationships Within the Residence
- B. Involving Tenants in the Decision-Making Process
- C. Connecting Tenants to the Neighborhood and the Larger Environment
- D. Promoting Positive Norms of Behavior Within the Residence

V. DEVELOPING A COMMUNITY BUILDING PLAN: GENERAL ORGANIZING PRINCIPLES

VI. CASE STUDIES OF CHALLENGES IN THE ORGANIZING PROCESS

VII. CONCLUSION

COMMUNITY BUILDING WITHIN A SUPPORTIVE RESIDENCE: BENEFITS TO MEMBERS OF THE COMMUNITY

A community is a group having common interests, common goals and/or common possessions or participation. Characteristics of a healthy and "developed" residential community include:

- Mutual Support
- Concern for Each Other's Safety
- Respect for Each Other's Property
- Mechanisms for Promoting Common Interests
- Addressing Problems

Actively pursuing a positive sense of community within the residence and integrating the residence into the neighborhood can have powerful benefits for both the staff and the residents. Community building efforts can help:

- ✓ Empower residents by giving them real authority and input and teach them skills needed to impact their environment.
- ✓ Increase and improve social and psychological ties among community members.
- ✓ Foster stability and a sense of belonging.
- ✓ Increase opportunities for communication and socialization among peers and between staff and residents.
- ✓ Actively promote a set of positive norms that counteracts the development of negative communities.
- ✓ Combat isolation that can result in psychiatric deterioration and/or relapse.
- ✓ Decrease the likelihood that the residence will become an isolated source of social, vocational and/or religious opportunities for residents.
- ✓ Appeal to applicants who may be considering tenancy and don't wish to live in a setting that feels institutional.
- ✓ Identify and address physical problems in the building and improve safety and security.
- ✓ Ensure a greater degree of customer satisfaction in service delivery.
- ✓ Promote the development of residents' advocacy and organizational skills.

BUILDING AND MAINTAINING RELATIONSHIPS WITHIN THE RESIDENCE

- **Form a Welcome Committee:** Developing relationships with tenants that include some level of trust and rapport takes time and effort and should begin shortly after a new tenant arrives. A traditional welcome committee can introduce new tenants to the neighborhood, the residence and neighbors.
- **Create a Formal Orientation Process:** Orientation packets with information about the service program, building procedures and neighborhood amenities are a help to new tenants and make them feel welcome and more at ease. Many supportive housing programs feature regularly scheduled orientations for new arrivals.
- **Create Welcoming Common Spaces:** Community development efforts require spaces for people to gather and to meet. Space for meetings, celebrations and casual socializing are usually configured into most supportive housing projects.
- **Promote Interaction:** Guest speakers, fairs, groups and workshops that focus on topics of common interest such as career advancement and employment, men's/women's issues, health and advocacy have been popular and helped to foster new relationships among tenants.
- **Create and Maintain Forums/Systems for Communication:** Systems can include: forums to announce events or news about building life, such as newsletters, public space announcement areas (bulletin boards, glass cases), notices regarding meetings, etc. (can backfire due to institutional feel), expectations and privileges of tenants (house rules, lease agreement).
- **Enhance Natural Supports:** Encourage tenants to reach out to other tenants by home visiting elderly, bringing meals to sick neighbors, celebrating holidays, celebrations, community dinners, etc. Pair up tenants who share things in common to maximize resources [e.g., babysitting or homework club].
- **Reach Out to All Tenants:** Supportive housing staff sometimes target activities largely to special needs individuals and tend to lose the interest of other tenants. However, the benefits of working to engage all tenants include an increase in the overall stability of the building and more interactions across tenant groups.

INVOLVING TENANTS IN THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

- **Involve Tenants in the Planning of Activities, Outings, Parties and Other Special Events:** There can be an ad hoc planning committee for specific events or an ongoing committee made up of staff and tenants.
- **Identify Natural Leaders and Develop Leadership Skills:** Are there particular tenants who are already known to have good skills in the areas of: diplomacy, communication, problem-solving abilities? Are there other people who might be interested in taking on a leadership role but lack the skills needed to do so? Are resources available to teach leadership skills?
- **Solicit Input about the Supportive Services that Are Being Offered:** Providers can also use tenant surveys to gather opinions about the perceived usefulness, quality and relevance of the services being offered. Some programs have suggestion boxes available in public places.
- **Create Open Communication Forums Such as Community Meetings:** Bringing together the tenant community has intrinsic and practical value, as tenants and staff work together to solve problems. The meetings help to troubleshoot issues, dispel rumors, sing praises, reduce the number of “public secrets,” and give community members the comfort of knowing there is a forum in which to express concerns. Agendas that include a time for announcements or open microphone are popular. Community meetings tend to be chaired by the director of the residence or other staff.
- **Hire Tenants in Staff Positions:** Tenants who are also employees are able to alert staff to issues that might otherwise not come out, as well as become more established in the decision-making process.
- **Involve Tenants in the Intake Process:** Tenants can participate in the final interview with prospective tenants to provide information, answer questions and participate in the decision-making process.
- **Involve Tenants in the Development of House Rules and Other Building Policies:** Experience has shown that there are numerous advantages to having tenants develop the rules for their buildings. When tenants are supportive of the rules of the house, they are more likely to incorporate them into practice and to remind others to do the same. In this way, rules can help influence the culture and norms of the residence. In soliciting input for the rules, staff should be clear regarding the use of tenant input and how it will be factored into final decisions to avoid raising unrealistic expectations.

TIPS FOR DESIGNING HOUSE RULES

House rules are vital in providing a safe environment and ensuring that tenants' rights are respected and maintained. In most cases, the house rules can be used as an annex to the lease. Tenants must comply with the house rules and with any changes adopted in the future as a condition of the lease agreement. Violations will be considered a breach of the lease.

- **PURPOSE OF THE HOUSE RULES:** When designing house rules, consider the intent behind the rule. Rules should have a clear purpose that should be understood by the community. Divisions are created within the community when rules are perceived to be for the convenience or benefit of a few.
- **ENFORCEABILITY:** How the rules will be enforced and what the process is for enforcing is key. Consistency is necessary when enforcing rules in a building. Rules that cannot be uniformly enforced should be excluded from the list. If it is discovered that a rule is not enforceable, consider other ways the same idea might be encouraged voluntarily.
- **LESS IS MORE:** Having a few enforceable rules is far more effective than having pages of rules that cannot be enforced or even effectively communicated.
- **TENANT INPUT:** Experience has shown that there are several advantages to having tenants participate in developing the rules of their building. Tenants are then more likely to incorporate them into practice and to remind others to do the same. Rules can both reflect and help influence the culture and norms of a building. The process of tenants and staff meeting to discuss house rules can be beneficial for community building and have therapeutic outcomes for tenants with special needs.
- **DEVELOPMENT:** Rules can and should be changed to meet the needs of the tenants living in the building. It is essential to create a structure and a process to review and revise rules. Having a process in place for residents to file grievances and to appeal sanctions for rule violations ensures that the rights of residents are protected and that residents are confident that rules are fairly enforced.

TIPS FOR STARTING A HOUSE RULES COMMITTEE

- Define the purpose of the House Rules Committee in relation to your program mission.
- Discuss the process with staff and allow for an opportunity to question things such as: the value of the process, the probable lack of staff expertise in this area, and the significant time commitment required to create an effective process.
- Don't be too cautious, you will naturally have some loose ends prior to starting because you need your resident partners to help you to define the process.
- Create a flyer, translated into all relevant languages spoken by residents, stating the purpose of the Committee.
- Talk it up! Make sure that each resident feels personally invited and that their input is welcome. Encourage people who have expressed dissatisfaction with house rules to attend.
- Invite the chairs of existing committees, groups or resident associations. Some examples may be a beautification committee, reading club or recovery group.
- Offer refreshments at all meetings.
- Monitor the demographic composition of the first meeting. Are all racial, ethnic, genders and age groups represented? If not, discuss outreach efforts to diversify the group.
- Keep meetings focused both on the goal, reviewing house rules, and on the process, involving residents in making decisions about their homes.
- Identify which rules are non-negotiable and why.

CONNECTING TENANTS TO THE NEIGHBORHOOD AND THE LARGER ENVIRONMENT

- **ALLOW NEIGHBORHOOD GROUPS AND ORGANIZATIONS TO USE SPACE WITHIN THE RESIDENCE FOR MEETINGS AND EVENTS:** Hosting the meetings of block associations and other civic associations can fill a neighborhood need while allowing tenants and staff to participate. Providing larger, more established organizations, such as Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), Narcotics Anonymous (NA), and Alliance for the Mentally Ill (AMI) with public meeting space can also be of mutual benefit to tenants and to individuals living and working in the community.
- **PROVIDE SPACE FOR A GALLERY:** Using open spaces and larger “community” rooms, some residences have been adapted to serve as galleries for local artists (including tenants). Similar to most art galleries, sponsors host “openings” and post announcements of new shows and invite a select list of special guests to attend as well. Staff and tenants with an interest or experience in art may serve on a review and selection committee.
- **CREATE LINKAGES TO OTHER ORGANIZATIONS, SELF-HELP GROUPS, COALITIONS AND ADVOCACY GROUPS:** Posting informational flyers and meeting notices of activities being sponsored by outside organizations and local religious institutions is an effective tool for communication. Using tenant meetings to discuss different opportunities and to encourage tenants to “get involved” can also be effective.
- **ENCOURAGE INVOLVEMENT IN NEIGHBORHOOD COMMUNITY-DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS:** Supportive housing has support staff and resources (however limited), and these are assets that many neighborhoods and communities do not have. In many cases, the efforts of staff and some resources can be adapted to assist the neighborhood and broader community. The value of being able to garner community support when requesting new funding or attempting to site a new program, for instance, is not to be underestimated.
- **A SHORT LIST OF EXAMPLES OF THESE INITIATIVES INCLUDES:**
 - ✓ Sponsoring or supporting community gardens
 - ✓ Sponsoring or supporting local crime-watch groups
 - ✓ Sponsoring or supporting neighborhood clean-ups
 - ✓ Sponsoring a “Speakers Bureau” of formerly homeless individuals and others who provide educational and motivational lectures
 - ✓ Opening businesses/storefronts that serve the neighborhood and provide jobs (cafés, bookstores, ice cream shops, thrift stores, bakeries)

GENERAL ORGANIZING PRINCIPLES

- ASSIST TENANTS IN IDENTIFYING & PRIORITIZING COMMON INTERESTS OR CONCERNS.
- PROGRESS FROM SIMPLE TO COMPLEX ACTIVITIES.
- IDENTIFY AT THE OUTSET WHAT ISSUES ARE NON-NEGOTIABLE AND WHY (e.g., rent payment, certain house rules, charting, etc.).
- FOCUS ON BOTH THE PRODUCT AND THE PROCESS.
- INVOLVE PARTICIPANTS IN THE ORGANIZING EFFORT WHO HAVE THE ABILITY TO MOTIVATE RESIDENTS. THIS INVOLVES:
 - ✓ having the interests of residents in mind
 - ✓ spending time getting to know people
 - ✓ stick-with-it-ness (doesn't quit during rough periods)
 - ✓ possessing skills for building trust
 - ✓ following through on commitments
 - ✓ providing coaching and support
- EVALUATE WHO MEETS, HOW OFTEN, AND HOW MEETINGS ARE STRUCTURED TO MAXIMIZE EFFECTIVENESS.
 - ✓ make a meeting place available
 - ✓ alert tenants to the meeting places & times
 - ✓ bring together natural leaders
 - ✓ initiate tenant meetings
 - ✓ bring outside speakers in to discuss issues of interest
- MODEL DECISION-MAKING, PROBLEM-SOLVING, NEGOTIATING AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION SKILLS.
- TEACH SKILLS FOR ORGANIZING, LEADING AND DOCUMENTING RESULTS FROM MEETINGS.
 - ✓ scheduling
 - ✓ creating agendas
 - ✓ minute taking and distribution
 - ✓ resolving conflicts
 - ✓ delegating tasks

COMMUNITY BUILDING CASE STUDIES: CHALLENGES IN THE ORGANIZING PROCESS

Discuss these questions for each of the following cases:

- **What are the goals?**
 - **What strategies might you use to build community & influence positive norms?**
1. You, a social service staff person, are facilitating a monthly tenant meeting. Maintenance problems are the most frequently raised issues in this forum. At this meeting, tenants discuss the lack of progress on the elevator repairs and are talking about organizing a rent strike. They ask you for advice about tactics.
 2. The policy about room changes has always been kept deliberately vague to allow management some discretion with a sensitive issue. Over time several different individuals or groups of individuals have been responsible for making decisions about room changes. Several tenants have approached social service staff to complain about room changes. They feel that some tenants have been granted room changes unfairly. They ask your assistance in addressing what they see as a bias problem.
 3. Only about 3% of the tenants in your building have been attending the tenants' meeting. The current agenda involves additions to the core set of house rules staff established for the building. There is one outspoken tenant who attends every meeting (as well as every activity and group!) and many decisions end up being made by him. You do not feel his opinion represents the majority within the building, and you suspect that he also turns off other tenants who might be interested in attending some meetings.
 4. Staff has never discussed the desired building norms, but you think everyone believes that part of the program mission is to help every tenant reach the expectations and criteria for tenancy. You are shocked when discussion in a staff meeting turns to the possible eviction of an elderly, mentally ill woman, on psychotropic medications, who has been urinating in planters in the common spaces.

5. Some tenants in your building have signed a petition stating, "Our home is being institutionalized by the posters that are placed in the lobby, elevators and hallways. These posters most often list activities and services offered in the building, and some have even been warnings about practicing safe sex and using condoms. We find them offensive and embarrassing."
6. In an attempt to recognize the diversity within the community of a large residence, staff has been celebrating a wide range of religious, political and spiritual events. Staff and residents feel it has gotten out of hand and that too many celebrations are happening. Disagreements result when trying to decide which events to cut and which ones to continue.
7. The staff has planned a trip to a show. Many residents signed up, but only 6 out of 25 show up on the day of the show.
8. A group of outspoken tenants has formed and is aggressively pressing building management and social services for changes. The group's top priorities include:
 - Swift action against drug activity in the building, including sting operations and evictions;
 - More intervention by social services to address "unacceptable behavior, such as yelling and screaming, wandering the halls" and other "low-functioning" behavior;
 - More services and attention for the higher-functioning tenants, such as "job training and education."

Management and social service staff are surprised by the aggressive style of the group and are not sure if their viewpoints are representative of the rest of the tenants.

**APPLICATION OF CONCEPTS AND DEVELOPING NEXT STEPS:
Social Norms and Organizing Issues Worksheet**

These worksheets can be used to facilitate discussion at meetings with community members or by trainees who can begin putting ideas on paper to be shared with the larger community in the future.

*** SOCIAL NORMS**

- **What are some of the existing norms in your building?** (such as behaviors associated with drugs or alcohol, dress in common spaces, use of social services)

- **What are some of the social norms you may want to encourage? What would be the desired norms?**

- **Identify norms that you find undesirable but tolerable.**

- **Identify norms that you find totally unacceptable.**

*** ORGANIZING ISSUES**

- **Identify an issue that tenants in your building might be interested in organizing around.**

- **What obstacles do you anticipate in this organizing process? Consider obstacles involving the organization, the staff or tenants.**

- **How might you address the obstacles you identified? What specific steps will lead to new and better norms & systems? How can you achieve the community you desire? Include at least the first three steps you would take toward making specific changes.**

- **Discuss communication forums (for everyone in the community — staff & tenants) and options for community-building discussions. Example: tenant groups to encourage input into decision making, orientation for new tenants (& staff?), newsletter, staff meetings — remember to include staff from different levels & shifts, log books.**

- **Where are the breakdowns in communication? Who feels out of the loop? Does everyone have the info they need to meet their responsibilities?**

**COMMUNITY BUILDING IN AND AROUND
SUPPORTIVE HOUSING:
ADDITIONAL READINGS**

Allen, M.: "Separate and Unequal: The Struggle of Tenants with Mental Illness to Maintain Housing." *Clearinghouse Review*, November, 720-739, 1996

This article assesses fair housing and tenant rights law for mental health consumers and challenges advocates to consider options and resources for securing full tenancy rights. The author suggests the need for mental health officials and advocates to work together to make community integration and rights protection central elements of any housing program.

Cohen, C., Phillips, M.: "Community Building: Principles for Social Work Practice in Housing Settings," *Chapter in Community Building: Renewal, Well-Being, and Shared Responsibility*, (Ed.) Ewalt, P., Freeman, E., Poole, D. NASW Press, 1998

With few American population centers approximating the village communities of the past, this chapter examines the properties of community that are as necessary as ever. Readers will learn about structures and processes that will enable disadvantaged citizens to more effectively define and advance their own life changes in a society that is increasingly non-responsive to their status. This book is a compilation of NASW journal articles organized around ideas of community.

Community Acceptance Strategies Consortium (CASC) and Non-Profit Housing Association of Northern California (NPH): "Siting of Homeless Housing and Services — Best Practices for Community Acceptance." February 1999

This report summarizes the lessons learned and the success of the Community Acceptance Strategies Consortium (CASC) in reducing homelessness in the San Francisco Bay Area. Through CASC's trainings, education and legal and technical assistance work, CASC has helped high-quality homeless housing and services obtain local government approvals for desperately needed proposals. This report is organized around an approach called Six Steps to Getting Local Government Approvals, and provides a summary of CASC's on-going strategy for increasing the supply of housing and services for homeless people. The approach assumes that housing developers, sponsors and service providers are proposing developments that will meet important community needs, are well-designed and will be well-maintained and well-managed.

Corporation for Supportive Housing (CSH): "Building Community Support for Supportive Housing." October 2002

This work booklet is an overview of supportive housing development issues prepared for a Corporation for Supportive Housing (CSH) Retreat in October 2002.

Deleon-Grandados, W.: *Travels Through Crime and Place: Community Building As Crime Control*. Northeastern University Press, 1999

The author of this book travels across the country to cities with model community based programs to experience and observe efforts to build community and control crime. He combines peoples' stories with personal reflections and analysis to provide a cohesive picture of community building as a response to crime and social problems.

Goering, P, Durbin, J., Foster R., Boyles, S., Babiak, T., Lancee, B.: "Social Networks of Residents in Supportive Housing." *Community Mental Health Journal*, June, 28:3, 199–214, 1992

This article discusses the importance of social support networks and how they impact health, mental health and well being. The findings support the positive influence of living in supportive housing but cautions that evidence suggests an abundance of staff has potential drawbacks. Providers are encouraged to strike a balance between meeting needs and creating needs while simultaneously nurturing the development of friendships.

Mattessich, P., Monsey, B., Roy, C.: "Community Building: What Makes It Work: A Review of Factors Influencing Successful Community Building." Amherst H. Wilder Foundation, 1997

This book is the result of research conducted across the nation to find what leads to successful community building. Researchers seek to discover how residents develop and sustain relationships, increase group decision-making skills and improve their ability to collaborate effectively to get things done. The result is a user-friendly synthesis of research about community building strategies together with helpful tools for people wishing to develop or improve their communities.

National Resource Center on Homelessness and Mental Health: "Challenges of Mixed Populations" Chapter in *Creating Community: Integrating Elderly and Severely Mentally Ill Persons in Public Housing*. U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 1993

This chapter focuses on the stigma of mental illness and offers tips for expanding opportunities for mentally ill individuals to integrate into their surrounding communities. Case studies are included.

Potts, M.: "Social Support and Depression among Older Adults Living Alone: The Importance of Friends within and outside a Retirement Community" Chapter in *Community Building: Renewal, Well-Being, and Shared Responsibility*, (Ed.) Ewalt, P., Freeman, E., Poole, D. NASW Press, 1998

This book is a compilation of NASW journal articles organized around ideas of community. This chapter highlights how community contributes to well-being and renewal.

Rog, D., Holupka, C.: "Reconnecting Homeless Individuals and Families to the Community," Washington, DC: Presented at the National Symposium of Homeless Research, October 29–30, 1998

This paper summarizes what we know about reconnecting homeless people and individuals into the community, including improving their residential stability and employability and reuniting them with family and friends. In recent years, much research has been done about connecting homeless people with housing, but much less attention has been placed on reconnecting people with social opportunities, employment and support services. The success of comprehensive programs that concentrate on the range of needs of individuals suggests the need for increased efforts integrating housing, support services, job training and social opportunities. This paper also discusses the barriers that challenge reconnecting people into the community.

Shapiro, J.: "SRO as a Village Community" Chapter in *Communities of the Alone*. Association Press New York, 1971

In this chapter, the author invites the reader to observe community life among SRO residents within the building and with the world outside the residence. The author discusses the complex social community that exists within the building and the lack of connection with the outside world. Although the book was written nearly 30 years ago, the insights are just as relevant today.

Internet Sites:

Center for Urban Community Services

<http://www.cucs.org>

Center for Urban Community Services (CUCS) provides a continuum of supportive services for homeless and formerly homeless people, including street outreach, a drop-in center, transitional and permanent housing programs, and vocational and educational programs. Particular emphasis is placed on specialized services for people with mental illness, HIV/AIDS, and chemical dependency. This website provides information and links to a variety of resources regarding transitional and permanent housing.

Community Tool Box: Bringing Solutions to Light. University of Kansas.

<http://ctb.lsi.ukans.edu>

This site is full of practical, easy-to-read guidance for improving communities. There are over 3,000 pages of specific, skill-building information that can be downloaded for free! The community-troubleshooting guide lists typical obstacles faced when building communities with strategies for overcoming them.

Corporation for Supportive Housing

<http://www.csh.org>

CSH's mission is to help communities create permanent housing with services to prevent and end homelessness. CSH works through collaborations with private, nonprofit and government partners, and strives to address the needs of tenants of supportive housing. CSH's website includes a Resource Library with downloadable reports, studies, guides and manuals aimed at developing new and better supportive housing; policy and advocacy updates; and a calendar of events.

National Alliance to End Homelessness (NAEH)

<http://www.naeh.org>

The National Alliance to End Homelessness (NAEH), a nationwide federation of public, private and nonprofit organizations, demonstrates that homelessness can be ended. NAEH offers key facts on homelessness, affordable housing, roots of homelessness, best practice and profiles, publications and resources, fact sheets and comprehensive links to national organizations and government agencies that address homelessness.

National Resource Center on Homelessness and Mental Illness

<http://www.prainc.com/nrc/>

The National Resource Center on Homelessness and Mental Illness provides technical assistance, identifies and synthesizes knowledge, and disseminates information. Users can be linked to findings from Federal demonstration and Knowledge Development and Application (KDA) projects, research on homelessness and mental illness and information on federal projects.

Wilder Foundation

<http://www.wilder.org>

This website offers practical guidance for nonprofit agencies, including information on affordable housing, collaborating with partners and community building. Publications can be ordered for a fee with some available to download for free. There are helpful links to other sites.